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*How best to learn to speak or teach a language :
better because easier—easier for being quicker.*

As a fitting introduction to this paper, and somewhat suggestive of the necessity of reducing to a system, a practical one, of arriving at the result aimed at, and as set forth in the title, we here rehearse the following remarks of Dr. Stewart as given under the heading "Suggestions about learning Languages" in the *Quebec Morning Chronicle*, of which Mr Stewart was then chief editor. These remarks by the doctor are prefatory to an article on the subject by a writer in *Chamber's Journal* which is reproduced herewith.

"SUGGESTIONS ABOUT LEARNING LANGUAGES"

"How may one best learn a foreign language? No one method has ever been agreed upon, and it is not likely that any one system will ever receive universal approval. A writer in *Chambers' Journal*, who does not pretend to enter into scientific dissertation, but rather attempts to convey "a few simple hints" to those who are interested in the subject, suggests that many persons who have endeavored at various times in their lives to acquire a knowledge of foreign tongues, but gave up the undertaking, would again try were it not for contemplation of the hard, grinding, uninteresting nature of the task before them—the visions of endless paradigms, of rules upon rules with all their confusing exceptions, of dull exercises that seem never to get beyond the "books of my sister's brother's friend," or the particular situation of this or that particular individual's umbrella, steel pen, pencil case, or other interesting object. The "accepted notion" of what is required to be done in the initiatory process of learning some foreign tongue—the wading through a grammar of perhaps a hundred and fifty pages, getting by heart all the conjugations, inflections, exceptions and idioms—after which the pleasant prospect is held out that one may *then* begin to read something, is opposed by this writer. He says:

"Such a system—if system it can be called—is an utterly erroneous one. Little wonder that it repels so many from taking up what is really a most interesting study. To any who contemplate doing so, the advice may be given to cast aside all preconceived ideas about the old methods, and begin at once to read the language they are going to learn. Thoughts about the grammar and the rules should not be allowed to trouble the mind. Except to those who have had some previous grounding in a language, the grammar is sure to prove a stumbling-block, and to beget naught but despair. A good dictionary, and a book of simple tales in the language chosen,

are all that is necessary in the first instance. With these in hand, the motto of the beginner should then be to read, read, read. The printed page, at first new and unfamiliar, will gradually unfold itself as word after word is learned, and when a sentence has been translated, the reader will go on with a strange feeling of delight to master more of the contents. There is no better method of retaining a word in the memory than in having to go to the trouble of looking it up in the dictionary. The word will be certain to stick, more especially if found recurring once or twice in the same page. As much reading should be done as time will allow. A page of the dictionary may also be frequently gone over. It soon acquires a wonderful interest. In this way the study is made from the first attractive and agreeable. If the book read be by one of the best writers, its inherent qualities will interest, while the increasing power to interpret correctly the writer's meaning will act as a constant stimulus to go on acquiring more words and phrases, and their correct use. The help of a friend imbued with similar desires and aims will be useful. At the very outset, attempts should be made to carry on conversation together in the language. The power to do this, at first halting and awkward, will gradually expand. The name of every object which is round about us in our daily life should be learned and referred to in conversation. The phrases employed to denote particular actions and feelings should be looked up as they recur to the mind. Now and again the conversation that may be heard at the table, in the train, anywhere, may be translated mentally. There are many times when one is alone and there is nothing in particular to occupy the thoughts. Such a moment should be seized to recall words we have come across in our reading, and thus make them the more firmly our own. A book of poems will be of much assistance. It is easier to learn a poem by heart than a bit of prose, and if the meaning of each passage has been thoroughly mastered, it will be a simple operation to recall each word by its context. In this way it is wonderful how rapidly the vocabulary increases."

The writer does not counsel neglect of the grammar. He thinks that, by learning to read first, the grammar will by and by be taken up with almost as much interest as the tale itself. But he insists that the grammar should be given a secondary place.

The author of the present paper is altogether at one with all those, and their name is legion, who are of opinion that grammar should be given quite a secondary place in the learning of a language, or of how to speak it, at least, if not to write it.

We naturally look around us as in all other cases where something is to be done, for a clue, a hint suggestive of how to do it. To start again or anew at devising means by which rectilinear alternating motion as that of the piston of a steam cylinder may be converted into circular, or the contrary proposition, would be absurd, without first enquiring what had already been achieved in that

direction and then studying how such modes or methods could be improved on. That heavy weights for instance can be raised, we have the proof around us in the pyramids, in the obelisks, in the mighty works of antiquity. It would then be sheer loss of time to set to work again to reinvent the inclined plane, the wedge and screw, the lever, pulley and axle, the anti-friction roller. It would behove us therefore to study up and see what lore were stored up for us, ready made, in museums and in books.

Man has been largely indebted to nature in his discoveries and inventions: how did Noah build the ark but in imitation of the ribbed structure of the human frame or of that of birds and quadrupeds in general. Where can you have a closer resemblance than between the hull of a vessel of our day and the chest or thorax of vertebrates, where the keel and keelson confining the cross ties between them as they do, are the back bone of the structure, the vertebral column, the ribs hinged to them—the breast bone or sternum as in man, the confining deck or whale back; or reverse the skeleton as in the goose, with the breast bone for the bottom of the vessel, the projecting spine or web the keel, the yacht slip keel of the present day, the back bone in turn the deck, the ribs the sides, the flesh and skin the planking or outer sheathing.

Again, is it at all likely that man would ever have dreamed of making up a ball or the semblance of such a figure too vast to be cut bodily from the solid — a dome for instance, a balloon, an imitation of the terrestrial sphere, of component ungulae traced from and meeting at the centre or at the poles, had he never seen the suggestive melon of the thus ribbed type or had the inner structure of the orange, the very poetry of geometrical conception not been revealed to his wondering and delighted contemplation.

And why not then apply this process to any other matter of enquiry: the study of a language or aught else. Go we back then to the beginning of the world, or after God created Adam and what are we to infer from holy writ, but that the almighty spirit so stored Adam's mind with words — as He had provided him with all else that was required to minister unto his material requirements of food, and dress and shelter. Yes, and God commanded him that he should give unto every thing a name.

Adam had not then learned to spell, he had no alphabet, no written alphabet, no phonetic set of elements or signs; nor did he require such for spoken language; but he possessed within him the phonetic elements, the simple alphabetic sounds and utterances, or the faculty to utter them, many of which are of themselves and in whatever language, as to day in our own, expressive of numerous things as *a* an article or one of any thing, *aye-aye* — affirmative — *e, he* — *I, i*, myself, *eye* the organ of vision — *o - oh* excl., *owe* or to *owe* — *U*, you, yourself, *ewe* the female sheep, *yew* a tree and others; consonants for instance which not generally expressive of themselves, can

be with vowels compounded into words to suit all purposes; though even among the latter many subserve the purposes of words as b - be v. - bee an insect, e - see v. - sea ocean, j - jay a bird, k - quai a pier, l - ell a measure of length, p - pea a vegetable, q - cue, r - are, v., t - tea an herb, y - why adverb.

Later on and after tradition had handed down these appellatives to posterity; when man began to separate from his fellows and emigrate to parts remote, parts whereto the human voice could no longer reach; it became necessary to seek for images which like the commandments could be traced on stone or wood or bark or papyrus or paper, and being permanent and ineffaceable could be sent by water or by land, conveying messages and information. Hence thenceforth the necessity of written language and of embodying each alphabetic sound into an image of itself; and which variously combined with other sounds or signs we now call letters, came in course of time to form our written language.

But with this we are not now concerned. Our enquiry is how to learn or teach another to speak or talk and thus put one in a way to convey one's meaning.

Now how did Adam proceed to bring forth order out of chaos — precisely as his Divine Master, the creator of all things, had done in the beginning, when as the Mosaic version reads, He eliminated all things out of chaos. Adam's mind as stated, was stored by the Creator with all the sounds and words his vocal organs could give utterance to, his hearing phonograph, his eyes perceive and of which images could be photoed on the retina; but he must do it and he no doubt did, by proceeding, as the Deity had done, in order. His first requirements were concerned with the names of things or what we now call nouns or substantives; but as there are thousands such he must divide them into families or distinctive groups and this he did at the fiat of the Creator by descending from the concrete whole — the universe — to the component parts or features: the Earth he stood on which to him was the basis of the system, the sky or firmament, the Sun, the Moon, the Stars, Venus, Jupiter and Mars may be, unless that by his unassisted vision he could take in what we cannot now a day without a telescope, the planet Mercury, Saturn and its rings and the very satellites.

He may not have known, save by divine intuition, the configuration of the Earth; but if he did he would proceed to call this a sea and that a continent, a lake, an island; and if he did not, or his descendants, until later; still was there ample material for classification in his mind: the land, the water, the plain and valley and the mountain; the rill, the rivulet, the brook, the rivers, and now, as said, what he was more directly interested in as shelter, food and raiment: and first the grass and shrubs and trees, calling each one in succession by its name and storing them in that compartment of his brain adapted to the remembrance of such a series; and now the animals, the ox, the ass, the horse, the mammalia in general;

the other inhabitants of the earth all classified by him, the vertebrates, invertebrates, snakes, reptiles, insects and the like.

Now he looks forth beyond the earth and finds himself in an ocean which he calls the air, the atmosphere and he takes cognizance of its winged denizens: the fly, the bee, the bird which he successively classes in his mind or memory—the fowl, the eagle, the bird of prey, the owl, the ostrich and the humming bird. He next explores the waters of the earth and with rod and line and bait intent, he brings forth the dwellers of the deep and names and classifies them as do our naturalists of to-day; and the amphibia and all other living creatures,

Again there are the rocks and soils: the hard, the soft, the light, the heavy, the unctuous, those fit for culture and those not so or only partly so; and then the metals or their ores or such of them as may have been known to our sire and sufficient for his wants and whereof or wherewith to make or fashion implements — domestic, offensive and defensive.

Adam after taking in all that surrounded him, must likely have concentrated his attention on himself and seen the necessity or advisability of so to say disintegrating his compound nature into its components, his synthetic make-up into its analytic elements, his concrete being into its abstractions, his whole in one word, into its composing parts; proceeding in regular rotation from head to foot; and finally so much as he may have known or surmised of the physiology of life: the breathing or inhaling and expiring, the digestive apparatus as evidenced in the preparation of his animal food, the lungs, the heart, the other viscera, the secretions, the blood and whether or not its circulation, its double circulation, the arterial or nervous and the pulmonary, were known to him and lost again ere Harvey rediscovered it, as so many things among the Chinese, and other nations, have been found to exist and to be known though not as yet dreamed of by Europeans and other civilized peoples.

And then with Adam and his family there must have sprung up as in our time the necessity of other nouns and names distinctive of relationship in its many phases, forming another important and essential subdivision; and then of pronouns expressive of proprietorship as mine, thine and and their and his—and of identity as he and she and it; and again of adjectives both qualitative and quantitative; and of numbers distinctive of the singular and plural and of ordinals as in hierarchy; the article as *a* and *the* illustrative of the abstract and the concrete; the preposition and the adverb and finally the verb expressive of the kind of action of which the meaning is to be imparted or conveyed.

And when all these parts of speech have been mastered in the analytical way set forth, they can be put together, built up into sentences; as with the written language we build up words from their component letters into syllables and compound them into expressions illustrative of all we can have to say or write about.

Well, in the same manner as our common parent has handed down to us by tradition the names of all things known to him, and our forefathers those of things unknown to Adam if such there may have been, so do we proceed to teach our children, by calling out and repeating as required the name of everything and thus is the spoken language perpetuated, and to be perpetuated in all time, and this is the desired clue at hand.

The best way then of acquiring or imparting the words of your own or any foreign language as French, or German, or Italian or any other, is certainly the system of categorizing them so to say into families, beginning with nouns and numerals and these, not by having to hunt them up in vocabularies or lexicons or other books, but *viva voce* or as in olden times by verbal tradition, from a friend or professor sitting, walking with you or at your dinner table or at mine, because then you have before you and around you the very things you want to know the names of, as they are suggested to you through the eye or other senses, and certainly would not always be were they not there as reminders.

And when I say : first the nouns and numerals, it is that the mere name of the thing asked for or required is in reality the only word that need be pronounced, as for instance on entering a hotel, the sole word " room " with an interrogative tone to it, if you are not sure there is one to be had, or a more peremptory tone if you think or know there is, will suffice and you may possibly be able to pronounce the word correctly or sufficiently so to make your meaning understood, you might not be advanced enough to say " can you accommodate me with a room " or I want a room please, or words to that effect — and so with chair or cab, or horse, or water or anything else you may require. And that I am right in asserting this, that only the name of the thing is required to render your meaning unmistakable — what else does the almost infant say but bread and milk and sugar — ball, and doll, and dog, and cat, etc, and there can be no mistake about what it wants without the addition of any article or verb or other part of speech.

The writer can not incline to Olendorf's method of teaching a language. He professes to do it in a hundred lessons more or less, where you formulate such phrases as " give me my hat " " where is my stick." Now, by this system if you require a knife or fork, a plate, a spoon, etc., instead of finding these words in one and the same category or chapter as they should be, they are dispersed at distances throughout the book : bread is in one lesson, butter in another ; Monday is here and Tuesday there and the names of other days not to be found — one, and two, and three may be together or near at hand while other numbers are searched for in vain — needle where ? and where again is thread.

Then sit we down together at your board or at mine and the greater necessity of our human nature being food, let us commence

with teaching or being taught, after the words table, breakfast, lunch, dinner, supper, meal, dessert, etc., the names of all comestibles or articles of food, they being all there before our eyes to suggest the inquiry as to their appellation, as bread, meat, potato; or following out the menu or bill of fare: soups, fishes, meats roast and boiled and fried, vegetables, salt, pepper, vinegar, etc., — puddings, pastry, fruit, not forgetting ales, wines and porters, liquors, tea, coffee, creams and so on. There is one category gone through and all and easily in a single lesson with much more to follow. And you are already in possession of many words you may require the use of at a restaurant or elsewhere as apple, orange, cheese, etc.

And what should prevent the father, mother or elder of the children from thus imparting to the younger so much knowledge in so easy and unobtrusive a manner; and why should the master mistress, nun or priest or minister presiding at the noon-day meal or other, not do the same.

We have just seen how the first category of words or family of names includes all articles of solid or liquid diet — and now for the vessels that contain them, the implements of every kind made use of in their ministration to the wants of man: as plate and knife and fork and spoon and carver and all and every other article on the table or adjoining buffet or étagère, not forgetting cork and cork-screw, table cloth or table napkin and the like.

And now you are already in a position, after a single lesson or only part of one, to club your words or some of them and make sentences or the embryos thereof or portions of a phrase, as "glass water," bottle beer, plate cheese, cup coffee, saucer cream. Never mind the article as yet or the word *some* or the preposition *of*. They can be done without until you have got on further with your nouns; but for variety sake and to prevent monotony you may strike off into some side issue and learn, as another group, the days of the week, the months of the year, and how to count from one to ten or twenty and then to a hundred and a thousand and so on, and then the ordinals as first and second, third, fourth and fifth, &c.

Again returning to our names of things, take up another series, to wit: the articles of furniture, as couch and clock and picture, desk and drawer and book case; and then you can ask for two chairs, three glasses or allude to the third day, fourth month, fifth year. Now another grouping of things that are together, and which you should not separate in their nomenclature: the house you live in or any other or the hotel, it matters not, the same or similar component parts make up the whole, as window, door, stairs, wall, partition, kitchen, hall, billiard room, bed room, floor, ceiling, basement, attic, dormer, counter, and front and rear and up and down and right and left; and then can you say up stairs, down stairs, front door, second floor or story, attic window &c.

And now go out upon the street and ask what, in the language you are endeavoring to pick up, is a church, a bank, a theatre, a

school, convent, college, court-house, jail, rink and other structures. Now there are other things to be seen upon the street or square or public highway there is the street itself, the side walk, the kerb, the catch basin for surface water, the lamp post, telegraph and telephone posts and wire, the green-sward, stepping stone, fountain, monument; and again objects in motion: the horse or dog or goat, the two wheel, four wheel vehicle, the cycle, bicycle, tricycle, icicle.

Now concentrate a little of your attention on yourself and learn the name of every component portion of your body, in order and in a way to forget nothing as head and hair and ear and ears and nose and mouth and tooth and teeth, eye and eyes, neck, shoulder, arm, hand, trunk and thence descending to your very foot and toe and toe nail, for surely this is an important group of words, not to be jumbled up heterogeneously with any other category and you can forget nothing by this mode of proceeding with your education.

Take up now the inner man and find out in the language you are striving to acquire the corresponding word for heart and lungs and liver and the other viscera, flesh, bone and muscle, nerve, marrow, brain, blood, vein and artery, etc. And now that you are able to tell of your own outward and inward individual, see to your put-on or articles of dress as boots and shoes and pants and shirt and coat, collar, neck-tie, hat, cap, kerchief, cane, umbrella, breast pin, eye glass or glasses; not forgetting the female requirements of similar import as ulster, chemise, corset, parasol, brooch, button and button hole hook and eye, pocket, ear-ring, watch and fan, etc., and as above made up, one is a man, a woman, a boy, a girl, a child, a baby.

Now group together the appellatives expressive of relationship as father, brother, sister, cousin, husband, wife, nephew, niece, god and grand-father, and ancestors of the maternal persuasion, and to wind up this living moving group, be sure not to omit the ever active and ubiquitous mother-in-law.

Well, as you see, nouns are the great desideratum; but when these are mastered, or as I said before, as a side issue and to guard against monotony, take a lesson or give one in the articles: a, an, the, and the pronouns I, you, she, they, him, her, it, mine, thine, yours; and now you can ask for "my cane," give him "his hat," allude to "her bonnet," their school, my second husband, his third wife,

Prepositions and adverbs may now claim your attention and you need not be particular as to the part of speech they are to be classified under, for many such words are at the same time prepositions, adverbs, adjectives and nouns. You can now say: before breakfast, after dinner, nearly six o'clock, at church, with her, enough wine, too much water, to-morrow, this evening, agreeably, politely, honestly &c.

Adjectives are numerous but those most likely to be first required are good and bad, stout and thin, fat and lean, pretty, ugly,

fine, cloudy, rainy, cold, damp—beautiful sky, a long way, fat fellow, a quick horse, an ugly dog.

Verbs can be dispensed with to a great extent till other parts of speech are mastered. We all know how much meaning may be conveyed by intonation of the voice, the most simple of gestures, a mere glance of the eye, a shrug of the shoulders, a frown, a smile, a look. Until you know the verbs pass, hand, please and are able to say : will you hand me an orange, the simple word orange will suffice with a look at the containing dish or basket, an inclination of the head expressive of "I would thank you for" and a slight advance of the hand or your plate.

Of many verbs we have the action as a noun, as with play, dance, walk, ride, drive, smoke, etc., and until you can say will you dance with me, or go a walking, the simple word walk used interrogatively will cause your desire to be perfectly understood; and let any one say "lunch with me to-morrow" you bet I'll understand that just as though he said "may I request that you will have lunch with me to-morrow, notwithstanding the omission of the four verbs may, request, will and have. And if your wife or sweetheart stopping before a shop window should say : Oh what a lovely bonnet, don't you think a mere beseeching look would be just as effective as if she added, will you, wont you buy it for me. And in fact some languages have no verbs at all among their parts of speech, which is no obstacle with those who speak them from making themselves thoroughly understood; but verbs are very handy and should of course be taught as other parts of speech, some of them at any rate, as to be, to have, to go, to come, to pass, to dwell, to get up, lie down, sleep, eat, drink, sit, stand, talk, ask, tell, love, hate, dislike, promise, wait, read, wash, work, brush, open, shut, rise, fall, jump, kneel, run, buy, sell, bargain, bear and to be borne, baptized, grow, be married, live and die.

Nor is this grouping together of so to say homogeneous words, at all conjectural with the writer, as to its usefulness. He knows the thing from having practiced it himself; for while possessing French and English, enough of latin to guess at a little Spanish and Italian, enough of greek for the etymology of words; he conceived the idea, now forty years ago or more, while an alsatian pupil was for a few weeks with him, of testing the system, in case he should ever go to Europe, which he has since done, of thus learning all such essential words as might be necessary to make his meaning understood while travelling in Germany; and this is the very way in which he did it, to wit : by learning all his words by categories, groups or families as just expounded and strange to say, though so many years have gone by, the groupings and their component individualities are still mostly in his memory.